

LESSON: POSITIVE FEMALE CHARACTERS (JADE & THE SCYTHIAN)

In this lesson or series of lessons, students will watch the 'Positive Female Character' videos from the Feminist Frequency series *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*, and consider the characters Jade and The Scythian and how they operate within their respective narratives. Students will compare the development of these characters and their games with other representations of women considered in other *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games* videos, and will ask what sets these characters apart. Finally, students will ask what these characters reveal about how the use of positive female characters might change the landscape of gaming.

LEARNING GOALS

By the end of this lesson/series of lessons, students/viewers will:

1. Learn about the characters Jade and The Scythian as examples of positive female characters in games;
2. Compare these characters with representations of women problematized in other *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games* videos and ask how these characters are different;
3. Consider the broader impact the use of positive female characters might have on the gaming industry, and how gaming might improve by incorporating the aspects discussed.

MATERIALS

- Computer
- Projector
- Printed copies of 'Positive Female Characters' note companions

Before: Minds On

While they can be watched independently of the rest of the *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games* series, these videos are better when viewed after the rest of the series, as the previous videos provide students with an understanding of what makes these characters so different from the norm in video games. In this way, the 'Minds On' activity for this lesson involves a conceptual recap of the previous videos.

On the board or on chart paper, write "Looks Like"/"Sounds like"/"Feels Like" under the heading "Common Representations of Women in Video Games". Ask students to draw from previous *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games* videos, and then to list off what these representations often look like (visual characteristics), sound like (narrative voice, etc.), and how these representations make individuals feel when playing a game as well as how they make the critical player feel when playing. [15 MINUTES]

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During Action!

Watch the 'Positive Female Character – Jade' video.
Below are listed places to pause due to time restraints or opportunities for embedded discussion and/or activities:

- 1:02 Visual Design and Personality
- 1:35 Relatable Concerns
- 2:50 Character Development and Gameplay
- 3:40 Alternatives to Violent Problem Solving
- 6:20 Narrative
- 6:40 The Hero and Individualism: Mutual Respect and Partnerships
- 10:40 Suggestions for Developers **[15 MINUTES]**

Watch the 'Positive Female Character – The Scythian' video.
Places to pause:

- 0:40 Parallel between *The Legend of Zelda/Sword & Sorcery*
- 1:05 Women as Mythic Heroes
- 2:00 Abandoning Gendered Signifiers (Constructing Character)
- 4:00 Moving Beyond Combat-based Gaming
- 4:45 Subverting Expected Gaming Tropes
- 5:25 Women, Death and Mourning in Gaming **[15 MINUTES]**

Differentiated Instruction:

- Note companions to help students work through definitions and content, including collaboration following viewing;
- 'Pause and Reflect' opportunities throughout viewing
- Emphasis on the use of visual examples

After: Consolidation & Connection

After viewing these videos, create another "Looks Like"/"Sounds like"/"Feels Like" chart under the heading "Positive Representations of Women in Video Games" and ask students to draw both from the 'Positive Female Character' videos and their own experiences, opinions, and hopes to consider what more positive representations would look like, sound like, and feel like to them. A way to scaffold this discussion might be to draw from specific aspects of character development outlined in the videos (i.e. visual design, narrative, personality-driven gameplay mechanics, etc.) **[15 MINUTES]**

POST-VIDEO ACTIVITY OPTIONS

These activities can be used in-class or as summative evaluations (assessment of learning) provided they also work to prove students are reaching curriculum expectations within the courses in which this lesson is being used. These activities are also flexible depending on resources and needs – students can work independently or collaboratively.

1. Mythic Heroes and Game Development

Using the comparison between Link from *The Legend of Zelda* and The Scythian from *Sword & Sorcery* as a foundation, this activity will ask students to create a positive female character while drawing parallels between potential narratives for a game and either (a) Myths and Legends from history where there is a 'hero' or major protagonist, or (b) Another fantasy game.

Students will brainstorm ideas of how to adapt and, more importantly, subvert, traditional norms through the myth or game they chose into a new game idea. They will play around with the concept of the 'mythic hero' as part of a rough game pitch which they will then share with the class.

Students will be given 5 small cards each. On each card they will be asked to write brief ideas or sentences that subvert aspects of the representation and narrative of the 'mythic hero'. The five aspects are 1) the appearance of the character including visual gendered signifiers, 2) the backstory of the character, 3) the quest and motivations of the characters, 4) the abilities the character has and the mechanics the player uses to engage with them, 5) the possible outcomes of the game (tragic, triumphant, neutral, etc).

Students will then break off into small groups, and the cards will be shuffled and distributed between groups. Groups will work together to select one card from each category and create a game pitch that subverts the conventions of the mythic hero tale.

Alternative: Game pitches can be created in groups or individually without the use of cards by asking them to consider how they would subvert traditional features of the mythic hero. Exercise can be guided by asking students to refer to the five aspects listed above.

2. Creating a Character Profile: Positive Female Characters

Students will choose what they believe is an example of a positive female character from media (novels, movies, TV shows, video games, comic books, etc.), then create a character profile.

They will also consider how the creator (author, director, illustrator, developer etc.) represents this character within the narrative they inhabit, and how that impacts the reader/viewer/player's experience of that character. Students will present these profiles to their peers in small groups, and will be encouraged to compare and contrast the characters they chose.

Alternative: Students will create these character profiles and then will print off a photo of them or

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draw an image of their character themselves. On the board or on chart paper various categories will be listed including:

- **Media Form:** TV/Movie/Video Game/Art (add others as necessary)
- **Story:** Dystopia/Adventure/Drama (add other genres or story 'types' as necessary)
- **Supporting Characters:** Independent/Co-operative Storylines (Is this character helped, or are they more independent?)

More categories may emerge as students reflect further upon the characters chosen. This activity is meant to create a visual opportunity for students to discuss and identify patterns regarding the narrative uses for positive female characters, and to generate discussion around observations.